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Introduced by Senators Alpert, Kuehl, Ortiz, and Scott

May 15, 2003

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Senate Resolution No. 20—Relative to eugenics.

1 WHEREAS, The goal of the eugenics movement of the  
2 twentieth century was racial betterment through the elimination of  
3 hereditary disorders or genetic defects by means of sterilization,  
4 selective breeding, and social engineering; and  
5 WHEREAS, The eugenics movement gained popularity in the  
6 United States around the turn of the century, with Indiana enacting  
7 the nation’s first eugenics-based sterilization law in 1907; and  
8 WHEREAS, In the United States Supreme Court case of Buck  
9 v. Bell (1927) 274 U.S. 200, Carrie Buck sued to overturn a  
10 Virginia state law that allowed state-mandated sexual sterilization  
11 of persons that the state deemed “imbeciles” or “feebleminded”;  
12 and  
13 WHEREAS, In a landmark 8-to-1 decision concerning that  
14 case, the United States Supreme Court upheld the sterilization law;  
15 and  
16 WHEREAS, More than 30 states enacted similar eugenics laws;  
17 and  
18 WHEREAS, In 1909, California passed a eugenics-related law  
19 permitting the involuntary asexualization of inmates of state  
20 hospitals and prisons; and  
21 WHEREAS, Under California’s eugenics law, and subsequent  
22 amendments to it, inmates of state hospitals and institutions for the  
23 mentally retarded, certain prison inmates who were considered  
24 sexual or moral “degenerates” or were serving life sentences, and

1 epileptics could be involuntarily sterilized so that they would not  
2 produce similarly disabled offspring; and

3 WHEREAS, In practice, the eugenics laws were used to target  
4 virtually any human shortcoming or illness, including alcoholism,  
5 drug addiction, pauperism, syphilis, and criminal behavior; and

6 WHEREAS, Regrettably, between 1909 and 1964, an estimated  
7 20,000 Californians were sterilized, and some 65,000 men and  
8 women were sterilized nationwide; and

9 WHEREAS, Regrettably, eugenics laws were frequently used  
10 as a respectable, “scientific” veneer to cover activities of those  
11 who held blatantly racist views; and

12 WHEREAS, The “science” of eugenics has since been  
13 discredited; now, therefore, be it

14 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California*, That it hereby  
15 expresses its profound regret over the state’s past role in the  
16 eugenics movement and the injustice done to thousands of  
17 California men and women; and be it further

18 *Resolved*, That this resolution addresses past bigotry and  
19 intolerance against the persons with disabilities and others who  
20 were viewed as “genetically unfit” by the eugenics movement;  
21 and be it further

22 *Resolved*, That all individuals must honor human rights and  
23 treat others with respect regardless of race, ethnicity, religious  
24 belief, economic status, disability, or illness; and be it further

25 *Resolved*, That the Senate urges every citizen of the state to  
26 become familiar with the history of the eugenics movement, in the  
27 hope that a more educated and tolerant populace will reject any  
28 similar abhorrent pseudoscientific movement should it arise in the  
29 future, and be it further

30 *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of  
31 this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

